

By One, by Two, and by Three.

I.

It was while I was at Cambridge that I first came to know Angus Macbane. We met casually, as undergraduates do, at the breakfast-table of a mutual friend, or rather acquaintance; and I remember being struck with the odd cynical remarks my neighbour threw out at rare intervals, as he watched the argument we had started, about Heaven knows what or what not, and were maintaining on either side with the boundless confidence and almost boundless ignorance peculiar to freshmen. I seem to see him now, leaning back after the meal in a deep arm-chair, with his host's cat purring her contentment on his knee. He never looked at the semicircle of disputants round the fire, but blew beautiful rings of cigarette smoke into the air, or gazed with a critical expression, under half-shut lids, at the photographs of actresses forming a galaxy of popular beauty above the mantle-piece. Then he would emit some sentence, sometimes sensible, oftener wildly nonsensical; but always original, unexpected—a stone dropped with a splash and a ripple into the stream of conversation.

I do not think that he showed any very particular power of mind at the breakfast-party, or indeed afterwards. What made one notice him was the faint aroma of oddity that seemed to cling to him, and all his ways and doings. He was incalculable, indefinable; this was what made a good many dislike him, and made me, with one or two others, conceive a queer liking for him. I always had a taste, secret or confessed, for those delicate degrees of oddity which require a certain natural bent to appreciate them at all. Extravagance of any kind commands notice, and compels a choice between admiration and contempt; moreover, it generally (and not least at a University) invites imitation. No one ever either admired or despised Macbane, as far as I know; and no one could ever have imitated him. The singularity lay rather in the man himself than in any special habit. For Macbane was not definably different from other young men. He was of medium height, slightly made, but not spare; his face had hardly any colour, and his hair and moustache were light. His eyes were of

a tint difficult to define—sometimes they seemed blue, sometimes grey, sometimes greenish; and he had a trick of keeping them half-shut, and of looking away from any one who was with him. This peculiarity is popularly supposed to be the sign of a knave; in his case it was merely a part of the man's general oddity, and did not create any special distrust.

Our acquaintance, thus casually begun, ripened into a strange sort of friendship. Macbane and I saw very little of each other; we did not talk much, nor go for walks and rows together, nor confide to each other our doings and plans, as friends are supposed to do. On rainy afternoons I would stroll round to his rooms and enter, to find him generally seated before the fire, caressing his cat. We did not greet each other; but I generally took up one of the numerous strange and rare books that he contrived to accumulate, though he spent very little money. This I would read, occasionally dropping a remark which he would answer with some cynical, curt sentence; and then both of us relapsed into silence. Tea would be made and drunk, and we sometimes sat thus till dinner-time, or later. Yet though I always felt as if I bored Macbane, I still went to his rooms; and when I did not go for some time, he would generally, with an air of extreme lassitude and reluctance, come round to my quarters, there to sit and smoke and turn over my books in much the same way as I did when I visited him.

Angus Macbane never told me anything much about himself or his family; he was one of the most reticent of mortals. All he ever did in that way was to say once in an abrupt manner that some of his ancestors had been executed for witchcraft; and when I vented some of the usual commonplaces on the barbarous ignorance and cruelty of those times, he cut me short by remarking in a tone of profound conviction that he thought his ancestors thoroughly deserved their fate, and that their condemnation was the only oasis of justice in a desert of judicial infamy.

From other sources, however, I discovered that Angus Macbane was an only son, whose parents had both died soon after his birth, leaving nothing behind them but their child. An uncle, a rich Glasgow merchant, had provided in no very lavish way for the boy's education, and was supposed to be intending to leave him a large share of his property. This was all I gathered from those people who made a point of knowing everything about everybody; and there is no lack of them at Universities.

Two striking peculiarities there were about Macbane, which stood out from the general oddity of the man. The first was his fondness for cats, or, to speak more accurately, the fondness of

cats for him. He had always one pet cat—generally a black one—in his rooms, and sometimes more; and when he had two, they were invariably jealous of each other. But he seemed to have an irresistible attraction for cats in general: they would come to him uncalled, and show the greatest pleasure when he noticed or caressed them. He did not stroke a cat often, but when he did, it was with a certain delicate and sensitive action of the hand that seemed to delight the animal above everything. So marked was the attraction he exercised, that a scientific acquaintance accused him of carrying valerian in his pockets.

The other peculiarity was in his books. He had picked up, in ways only known to himself, a very fine collection of early works on demonology and witchcraft. A more complete account, from all sides, of "Satan's invisible world" was seldom accumulated. There were books, pamphlets and broadsheets in Latin, French, German, English, Italian and Spanish, and some old family manuscripts relating to the arts or trials of warlocks and witches. There was even an old Arabic manual of sorcery, though this I am sure he could not read. Most of these works were of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, since which period, indeed, civilisation has ordained a "close time" for witches; and any treatises on the black art dated after that time Macbane not only did not buy, but as a rule refused to accept as gifts. "Early in the eighteenth century," he once remarked, "men lost their faith in the devil; and they have not as yet recovered it sufficiently to produce any witchcraft worthy of the name." And indeed he had the greatest abhorrence and contempt for modern Spiritualism, mesmerism, esoteric Buddhism, &c.; and the only occasion during his Cambridge life on which I saw him really lose his temper was when a mild youth, destined to holy orders, called on him and asked him to join a society for investigating ghostly and occult phenomena. He turned on the intruder with something like ferocity, saying that he did not see why people wanted to be wiser than their ancestors, and that the old way of selling oneself to the devil, and getting the price duly paid, was far better both in its financial and moral aspects than paying foreign impostors to show the way to his place of business. "Though what the devil wants at all with such souls as yours," he added meditatively, "is the one point in his character that I have never been able to understand. It is a weakness on his part—I am afraid it is a weakness!" The incipient curate turned and fled.

A few sayings of this kind, reported and distorted in many little social circles, gave Angus Macbane an evil reputation which he hardly deserved. The College authorities looked askance

on him, and some of them, I believe, would have been thankful if his conduct had given them a pretext for "sending him down," whether for a term or for ever. But no offence or glaring irregularity could be even plausibly alleged against him. He attended the College chapel frequently, and never lost an opportunity of hearing the Athanasian Creed. "When I hear all those worthy people mumbling their sing-song formulas, without attaching any meaning to them, and chanting forth vague curses into the air," he once said to me, "I close my eyes, and can sometimes almost fancy myself on the Brocken, in the midst of the Witches' Sabbath."

This devout assiduity was only reckoned as one point more against him; for Angus Macbane belonged by birth to the very straitest of Scotch Presbyterians, and evinced no desire to quit them, or to dispute the harshest and most repulsive of the doctrines handed down from his ancestors. Yet to my knowledge he never went near any Presbyterian chapel, but preferred, as his worthy uncle said, "to bow in the house of Rimmon."

This uncle, as I gradually divined, was the one being whom my friend regarded with something like hatred. Mr. Duncan Macdonald was the brother of Macbane's mother. He was a big, red, sandy man, rich, unmarried, and not unkindly in nature; and an ordinary person with a little tact could have managed him, if not with complete satisfaction, at any rate to no small profit. It is true, the manufacturer was one of those self-made men who think that no man has any business to be otherwise than self-made; but by flattering his pride, he could easily have been induced to support his nephew in ease, and even in luxury and extravagance, if enough show were made for the money. But he was a Philistine of the Philistines, two-thirds of his life dominated by gain, and the rest by a rigid sense of duty. Material success and respectability were his two golden calves; and to both of these his nephew's every thought and act did dishonour. Angus Macbane could not have been made a successful man by any process less summary and complete than the creation of a world for his needs alone; and not even this would have given him respectability. He could not live without aid from his uncle; but he accepted from him a mere pittance, which, grudgingly taken, soon came to be as grudgingly given. Yet when he forced himself to compete for scholarships and prizes which would have made him partly independent, he missed them in a way which would have been wilful in any other man. His essays were a byword among examiners for their cynical originality, perverse ability, and instinctive avoidance of the obvious avenues to success. Thus he

was constrained to depend on that scanty income of which every coin seemed flung in his face. With his developed misanthropy and contempt for ordinary men, he would at all times have been intolerant of the mere existence of such a man as his uncle; and that he himself should be hopelessly indebted to such a creature for every morsel he ate, for every book he read, was a sheer monstrosity to his mind—or so I should conjecture from what I knew of the two. Angus seldom willingly mentioned his uncle; and when he did so, it was with a deadly intensity of contempt in his tone—not his words—such as I never heard before or since.

II.

AN end comes to all things; and my time at Cambridge, which had passed as swiftly for me as for most men, and left me with the usual abundant third year's crop of unfulfilled purposes, came to its end in due course. Angus Macbane had "gone down" before I did, with a high second-class degree in mathematics, chiefly gained, as I happened to hear from an examiner, by a very few problems which hardly any one else solved. A serious quarrel with his uncle followed on this ill-success; but from motives of family duty and respectability Mr. Macdonald continued to pay his nephew enough to maintain life. No relation of his, he felt, must come to the workhouse.

For a year or two I lost sight of Macbane; and when I saw him again, he was living in lodgings in an obscure street of a London suburb. I had learnt his address from another old college friend, Frank Standish by name, who had kept up relations with Angus. Frank was a complete contrast to Macbane; he was a tall, hearty, handsome, athletic fellow, successful in everything he undertook, and was now making his way as an engineer, and likely to do well. It was this opposition in their natures that had begotten their friendship. I have seen them sitting together at Cambridge, Standish chatting on by the hour, and Macbane watching him in contented silence. As some one remarked, it was like the famous friendship of a race-horse and a cat.

I was myself now an under-master at a large day-school, and my evenings were in general free; so one night I called for Standish at his lodging, and together we trudged off to find Macbane. Our path led through one of those strange uncanny wildernesses that lie about the outskirts of every great and growing town. Skeletons of unfinished houses, bristling with scaffolding poles, loomed on us at intervals through the rainy mist; the roads were long heaps of brickbats and loose stones, already varied

with blades of coarse grass. The path we followed was seamed across with the ruts of heavy carts that had gone to and from the half-built houses; and we stumbled over posts and through plashy pools, along the ghostly highway, completely deserted now that the workmen were gone, and stretching its miles of raw ruin through the autumn mist. Standish whistled cheerily as he strode on through the desolation, and I was comforted to have him with me—I think I should almost have felt afraid but for his presence. We crossed the No Man's Land of chaotic brick and mortar, and found ourselves in a street of mean new houses. At No. 21, Wolseley Road, Standish paused and rang; a slatternly maid-of-all-work answered the bell, and ushered us into the presence of Angus Macbane.

He was sitting by a poor little fire, in a shabby arm-chair, with his black cat on his knee as usual, and a volume of demonology in his hand; and, save that the room was small, cheaply furnished and hideously papered, and the occupant looked thinner and wearier, we could have fancied ourselves at Cambridge again. But after the first greetings, I soon noticed that Macbane was changed for the worse since I had seen him last. He did not seem at all dissipated, nor had he acquired the air of meanness and shiftiness that marks the needy adventurer; but there was a genuineness, almost a desperation, in his cynical utterances, which they had not had before—a hopelessness of expression and an irritability which I did not like. The misanthropy at which he had played before was now in grim earnest.

He told us a little—very little; and that reluctantly—of his own way of life. He was doing nothing of any moment—a struggling unknown writer, spasmodically trying to secure some literary foothold, and failing always, whether by the fatality which attended him specially, or by the same chances as befall any author. Added to this misery was the consciousness of his dependence on his uncle, which was bitterer to him, I could see, than ever. He began to talk about Mr. Macdonald of his own accord, and that was always a bad sign.

“Do you know,” he said, with a bitter laugh, “my worthy relative is coming out here before long? He writes me that he is due in London on business in a fortnight or so, and will pay me a visit to see if I am still given over to the same reprobate mind as before, and opposed to what *he* calls my duty. Won't you come and see the fun, you two? I think I know how to aggravate him now, perfectly well. I assure you, at my last interview with him, I made him swear within three minutes—and he an elder!”

"I say, Macbane," Standish put in, in his good-natured way, "don't carry that game too far. The old chap is good for a lot if only you don't rub him up the wrong way. If you rile him this time, ten to one he cuts you off with a shilling—and then where will you be?"

"If he only would die!" Macbane went on, not seeming to hear his friend's remonstrance. "Fellows like that have no sense of fitness. When I saw him last he reminded me of one of those big fat coarse speckled spiders, that you want to kill, only they make such a mess. I should so like to murder him, if I could do it by deputy."

He was joking, of course, but there was more earnestness than I liked in his manner. I looked at Standish, and he at me, before I spoke.

"If those are your sentiments," I said, echoing his light tone, "we had better come to prevent bloodshed."

"Yes, do come," Angus resumed; "and if you will kindly take off his head outside, I shall be greatly obliged to you. Bring a delightful rusty old axe, Standish, with plenty of notches in the blade. It will be so nice to be like one of those dear Italian despots, and get one's assassination done for one. Though there are better than hiring a bravo, even. An ancestor of mine——" and here he stopped suddenly.

"Well, what did your ancestor do?" asked I.

"Oh," said Macbane coolly, "he raised a devil of some sort and got scragged by it himself."

As he spoke these trivial words, there came a faint sound at the door as of something scratching very gently on the panels. I turned to Macbane and asked—

"Is that your dog, Mac?"

"My dog!" he said with a shudder, "why, I *hate* dogs. I never have one near my room by any chance—except when the landlady sends me up sausages."

"Perhaps it is another cat come to make friends with you," suggested Standish. "There it is again. I will let it in, whatever it is."

He flung the door open, and the chill air rushed in from the draughty passage and stairs. There was nothing outside or in sight, and he shut the door again with a bang.

"I heard it distinctly," he said, in the aggrieved tone of one who fancies he has made himself ridiculous. "What could it have been?"

"Wind, perhaps, or a rat," said Macbane lightly. "There are plenty of rats in the place, and I am glad of it, for it is the only

thing that prevents me from expecting the house to fall every moment. When it is going to fall the rats will all run out, and my cat Mephistopheles will run out after them, and I shall run out after Mephistopheles; and the landlady and the first-floor lodgers, and the landlady's cat that eats my tea and sugar, will all be squelched together, to the joy of all good cats and men—eh, Mephisto? Why, what ails the cat?"

For Mephistopheles was standing upon his master's lap, with back arched and tail rigid and bristling, glaring into the darkest corner of the little room, and hissing in a passion of mingled rage and fear. Then, before any one could stop him, the cat made one leap at the window, with a yell and a great crash of glass, and was gone, leaving us staring at each other.

Angus Macbane spoke first, with a forced laugh.

"There goes my cat," he said, "and there goes one-and-nine for broken glass. Cats I may get again, but one-and-ninepence—never. A cat with nine lives, a shilling with nine pence—all lost, all lost!"—and he went on laughing in a shrill hysterical way that I did not at all like. During the pause that followed, Standish looked at his watch.

"It is pretty late now," he said, "and I have a lot of working drawings to prepare to-morrow. Good-night, Macbane. If I come across your cat, I'll remonstrate with him for quitting us so rudely. But no doubt he will come back of himself."

As Standish said this, the rest of the large pane through which the cat had leaped suddenly fell out with a startling crash into the street, making us all wince.

"It was cracked already," remarked Angus; "and the glazier does not allow for the pieces. Good-night, both of you. I fancy I have something to do myself, too."

I was surprised, and a little hurt, at being thus practically turned out by my friend (for I had expressed no intention of departing, and it was not really very late); but I was not sorry to go now, and have the solace of Standish's cheery company home. A curious undefined feeling of apprehension was creeping over me, and I wanted to be out in the night air, and shake off my uneasiness by a brisk walk.

We went downstairs, leaving Macbane brooding in his chair. As the landlady saw us out, I slipped a half-crown into her hand.

"Mr. Macbane's window got broken to-night," I said. "Will you have it mended, and not say anything about it to him?"

I knew that he would probably forget the occurrence if not reminded of it. Standish nodded approval, and we went out into the mist. We walked on in silence till we turned out of the

lamp-lit and inhabited part, and then my companion remarked abruptly—

“That makes one-and-threepence I owe you, Eliot”—and relapsed into silence, not even whistling as he strode along.

We had reached nearly the middle of the long artificial desert, where a street was some day to be, when Standish stopped and caught me by the arm.

“Eliot, what is that?” he whispered.

We both stood still and listened. From the waste land beyond one of the skeleton houses came a fearful cry, whether of a child or an animal we could not tell—a scream of mere pain and terror, intense and thrilling, neither human nor bestial. Then there was a deep snarling growl, and the yell died into a choking gurgle, and suddenly fell silent.

“Come on,” Standish gasped, and ran with all his speed in the direction of the sound.

I followed as fast as my shorter legs and wind would take me over the stiff slimy clay of the waste land, and after a few minutes found him bending over a little dark heap on the ground at the edge of a puddle.

“Have you got a match?” he said.

I nodded—I was too much out of breath to speak—and pulled out my match-box. I struck a light, screening it with my hand, and we both looked earnestly at the black lump at our feet.

“Bah!” said Standish, as he mopped the perspiration from his face. “Why, it’s only a cat, and it sounded like a baby!”

It was the body of a large black cat, still warm and quivering, but quite dead. The throat was almost entirely severed, and the blood had streamed out, darkly streaking the thick yellow water of the pool. Of what had killed it there was no sign or sound, only, in the soft clay beside the puddle, there were marks which seemed those of the poor cat’s feet, and other footprints like these, but larger. I pointed them out to Standish.

“I see what it was,” he said, as we trudged laboriously back to the road. “The cat was out there, and some beast of a dog caught it and killed it—though what cat or dog should be doing there is more than I can say. What teeth the brute must have! Ugh! I hope he’s not waiting round to take another bite!”

We got back to the road unbitten, and went on our way in silence, till I said—

“Standish, do you know, that cat was very like Macbane’s?”

“Do you know, Eliot,” was his answer, “that is just what I was going to tell you?”

And not another word did he utter, till I left him at his door and said good-night.

III.

MACBANE was never a good correspondent, but he duly informed us of the date of his uncle's expected visit; and when the day came, I called for Standish in the evening as before, and we trudged off through another sloppy mist. Standish, good thoughtful fellow, had brought with him, in his overcoat pocket, a bottle of very fine old Irish whiskey, which he had long been treasuring up for some festal occasion, but now intended to devote to the mollifying, if possible, of Mr. Macdonald.

"Every glass he takes of this," he solemnly assured me as we went on, "will be worth a hundred a year to Macbane."

We did not go by the same dreary road that we had taken before. Frank declared, with a shudder, that the last cry of that cat was still ringing in his ears, and that he could not stand the ghastly place again. I was rather surprised at his unwonted nervousness, but readily acquiesced in it. So we went a mile or so out of our way, keeping along endless streets of shabby-genteel houses, which were sufficiently hideous, but not appalling; and about nine in the evening we reached Wolseley Road.

I was surprised and almost shocked to notice the change that had passed over Macbane in the few weeks since I had seen him last. He did not seem worse in health—on the contrary, there was at times a nervous alacrity about his movements which I had not remarked before. But his face and expression seemed to have darkened, as it were, and grown evil. His college cynicism had already turned into misanthropy; and now, I thought, it had developed into a positive malevolence. He still was silent and brooding, after the first greetings; but he no longer seemed dejected. Altogether a transformation of some kind had come to him, such that I—though not very impressionable—was rather inclined to fear than to pity him.

The conversation, as was natural, turned on the uncle, who might appear at any moment now. Standish and I joined in urging on our friend the necessity of attempting conciliation, of showing some semblance of submission. We had more than once induced him to do so before, though his perverse temper generally made him unable to do more than avert an instant stoppage of the supplies; but to-night he was obstinate, and even spoke as if he were the aggrieved party, and his uncle the one to make advances.

"If the old fool cares to be civil," he said fiercely, "then there's an end of it; and if not, there's an end too. I am tired of humouring him."

As he spoke, the "old fool's" heavy tread was heard on the stairs, and in another minute he entered. He was a big, strong, red-faced, coarse-looking fellow, with sandy whiskers and grizzled hair, who nodded awkwardly to us, and gave a surly greeting to his nephew, who sat still in his arm-chair, looking into the fire with half-shut eyes.

Mr. Duncan Macdonald seemed disconcerted by our presence, and I offered to withdraw; but Macbane would not let us.

"You see, uncle," he remarked, still keeping his eyes averted, and using the familiar title solely, "I am convinced, because he knew the uncle did not like it, "these gentlemen know all about our little affairs, and they had better hear your version of matters now than my version afterwards. Besides, one of them is going to be a literary man, and write a tale with Scotch characters in it; and you will be quite a godsend for him, as raw material for a study. If you want to swear at me, pray don't mind him; there is nothing that tells more in literature than a little aboriginal profanity, properly accented."

This was a bad beginning for an interview; and would have been worse still had Mr. Macdonald been able fully to understand his nephew's speech. What he did understand, however, obviously offended him; and he began to address Macbane in no very conciliatory tones, though at first with a forced moderation of language and strained English accent which were evidently the result of the young man's taunt. Then, as Macbane did not answer, but sat still looking into the fire, his uncle began to lose temper. His language grew broader and stronger, both as Scotch and as reproach. He addressed us with a sort of rough eloquence on the subject of his nephew's miserable laziness, shiftlessness, effeminacy—pointing at him, and showering down vigorous epithets on him. In the midst of his tirade, as he paused for breath, came a low sound of scratching at the door.

"There's that confounded rat again!" cried Standish, glad of any pretext for interrupting the miserable business. "Dead, for a ducat, this time!" He dashed open the door as he spoke, but there was nothing to be seen. Only the gaslight in the passage, flickering and flaring in the draught, sent strange shadows flitting across the walls.

Frank came back and sat down, and busied himself in uncorking his bottle of whiskey, and setting the kettle on to boil. I took up a book, so as not to seem to observe a scene which I knew must be so painful and humiliating for Macbane. The uncle again plunged into the stream of his invective, and I kept my eyes on the nephew. I knew that he was really quite as

passionate as the elder man, and I was afraid of what he might do if he once lost his self-control; but though a little shiver passed over him sometimes, he was quite silent, leaning back in the arm-chair, with his head resting on his right hand, and his left arm hanging listlessly over the side of the chair. Presently he began to move the hands languidly to and fro, with the fingers outstretched, and the palm horizontal and slightly hollowed, keeping it more than a foot from the carpet. It was a curious gesture, but he had many odd tricks of the kind.

At last Mr. Macdonald, having spent his store of abuse without any response, began, I fancy, to feel a little ashamed of himself, and became more conciliatory, letting fall some hints as to the terms on which he might even yet receive his prodigal nephew back to favour. The manner of his overtures was far more offensive than their substance, and to one who could make allowance for the man's coarse nature, there was even a trace of a feeling that might be called kindness. But Macbane was always far more sensitive to externals than other men, and his uncle's condescension, I could see, irritated him far more than his anger. He left off moving his hand to and fro, sat up and clutched the arms of his chair. Then, when the older man had done, he cast one deadly look at him, and shook his head as if he would not trust himself to speak.

"Winna ye speak, ye feckless pauper loon?" roared his uncle, with a string of oaths.

Macbane was silent, but that good fellow Standish interposed at what he thought was the right moment.

"Come, Mr. Macdonald," he said frankly, "I don't think you should talk like that. After all, Macbane is your own sister's son, and he is not well now, and you must not come down on him too heavily. Let us have a glass of toddy all round now and part friends, and we three will talk it all over, and make matters smooth to-morrow. We can't do any good to-night."

As he spoke, he got out some tumblers from the cupboard and wiped them clean. The Glasgow manufacturer seemed a little mollified; nobody could help liking Standish or his whiskey, and all might yet have been well if the devil had not seemed to enter suddenly into Angus Macbane. Standish had poured out a generous measure of the fragrant spirit, and was turning to take the kettle off the hob, when Macbane sprang up like a cat, in a white heat of rage, took the tumbler from the table and flung it right into the grate. The glass rang and crashed, and the flame leapt out blue like a tongue of hell-fire; and Angus stood at the table, quivering all over, with his right hand opening and shutting as if feeling

for a weapon. Standish caught him by the arm and pulled him back into his chair.

"Are you mad, Mac?" he exclaimed. Macbane did not seem to hear, but sat glowering at his uncle. As for Mr. Duncan Macdonald, he turned purple with anger. The complicated atrocity of the insult—an outrage at once on kinship, hospitality, thrift and good whiskey—had smitten him dumb for a moment with surprise and rage. He clenched his fist and struck blindly at his nephew, who was fortunately out of reach; then he spoke in a husky but distinct voice, slowly, as if registering a vow.

"De'il throttle me," he said, "if ever you see bawbee of mine again." And he took up his hat and umbrella and turned to the door.

"Done with you, in the devil's name!" cried Macbane.

Without another word the uncle flung the door open, and shut it after him with a crash that shook the house. Then we heard him heavily stamping down the stairs and along the passage, till another great bang proclaimed that he had left the house. This last noise seemed to rouse Macbane from a sort of trance. He sprang up again and rushed to the door and threw it open, as if to pursue his uncle. We were going to stop him, for he looked murderous enough; but instead of dashing downstairs, he stopped, flung out his hand with a strange gesture, as if he were pointing at something, and muttered a few words that I could not catch. Then he shut the door and came back slowly to his old seat, as pale as a dead man.

In the excitement of the scene, we had none of us noticed the time; but now the cheap little clock on the mantelpiece struck twelve, and recalled the fact that two of us were far away from our lodgings. Standish and I looked at each other; we neither of us liked to leave Macbane alone yet. The man's expression as he flung the glass into the fire—still more his look as he pointed down the stairs—was black enough for anything; and if we went now, he seemed quite capable of going out and murdering his uncle, or staying and murdering himself. Standish winked at me, and went out quietly: In ten minutes he came back and addressed Macbane, who was sunk in one of his reveries again.

"All right, old fellow," he said cheerily, "your landlady tells me her first floor is vacant, and she will put us two up for the night. So cheer up, Mac. It is a bad business, but we will see you through it, never fear. Now let's brew some punch and be jolly to-night at any rate, as we needn't go."

Macbane woke up again at this, with a sudden feverish gaiety. He eagerly took the steaming tumbler Frank prepared for him,

and drained it at a draught—he whose strongest stimulant was coffee. The whiskey did not seem to affect his head, however. More than this, he hunted out a soiled pack of cards from an obscure drawer, and proposed—he who hated all games—that we should play to pass the time. Dummy whist he thought too slow, and I proposed three-handed euchre, generally called “cut-throat.” The name seemed to amuse our friend vastly. He insisted on learning the game, and we started at once. His spirits were almost uproarious; I had never seen him like this before. Yet his gaiety was very unequal. Sometimes he would cut the wildest jokes, till in spite of our uneasiness about him we shrieked with laughter; and again he would sink back in his chair, forgetting to play his hand, and seeming as if he listened for some sound. After some time he went to the door and flung it open, declaring that he was “stifling in this hole of a room.” Then he sat down again to play, but fidgeted about in his chair impatiently. He was studying his cards, which he held up in his left hand, when I happened to look at the other arm hanging down by his chair.

“For goodness sake!” I exclaimed, “what have you done to your hand, Macbane?”

He held up his right hand as I spoke, and looked at it. Palm and fingers were dabbled and smeared with watery blood, fresh and wet. For a moment we stared at each other with pale faces.

“I must have cut my hand over that confounded tumbler or something,” said Macbane at last with an evident effort. “I will go and wash it off in my bedroom and be back in a moment.”

He slipped out as he spoke, and we heard him washing his hand, muttering to himself all the time.

Then in a few minutes he came back, keeping his hand in his pocket, and resumed the game. But his former high spirits were gone, and another tumbler of punch failed to recall them. He made constant mistakes, played his hand at random, and at last suddenly threw all his cards down on the table, laid his head on them, and burst into a terrible fit of hysterical sobbing.

We did not know what to do with him, but Standish laid him on the hard sofa, and in a little time he seemed better, though greatly shaken, and managed to control himself. He thanked us in a whisper, and told us to go, and he would get to bed alone. We were still rather anxious about him, but there seemed no reason for staying with him now against his will. The natural reaction had followed on all the strain and excitement, and I, for one, was glad that it was no worse. So we left him beginning, in a slow and dazed way, to get to bed, and descended to try and snatch a little sleep in the genteel misery of the first-floor lodgings.

IV.

WE passed a rather disturbed night in our strange quarters. There were rats in the walls, the windows rattled, and altogether there were more queer noises than one generally hears in houses so new. However, we did get to sleep, and did not wake again till the grey dull sodden dawn was making ghastly the little strip of sky visible over the grimy roof of the house opposite. We rose and dressed quickly and went up to Macbane's room. I peered in, but he was still sleeping heavily; so we busied ourselves, as quietly as we could, in preparing breakfast, intending, if our friend did not wake, to go off to our own work for the day, leaving a message for him. We purposed, in a rather vague manner, to do something for poor Macbane. Standish hoped to work on the better feelings of his uncle; I had resolved to devote some of my little savings to keeping my friend out of the workhouse.

We were half through our scanty and silent meal, when a heavy tread was heard on the stairs, making apparently for the room where we were. "What luck!" said the sanguine Standish; "here's the penitent uncle, come back after the whiskey. Now leave me alone to manage him. There is half the bottle left."

The steps came up to the door and paused: then there was a single sharp rap, and in walked—not Mr. Macdonald, but a policeman. If Standish and I had been thieves or coiners taken in the act, we could hardly have shown more confusion. My first thought was that perhaps Macbane had done something wrong; and this suspicion was confirmed by the officer's first words.

"Beg your pardon, gentlemen," he said; "but is either of you Mr. A. Macbane?"

"No," said Standish; "Mr. Macbane is asleep in the next room. What do you want with him?"

"I want him to come with me to the station, as soon as convenient, sir," was the reply.

"What for?" persisted Standish. "Nothing wrong, I hope?"

"Nothing wrong about him; leastways, I don't suppose so, sir," said the man. "But there's been foul play somewhere. There's been a body found in the road out a mile off, and a card in the pocket with Mr. Macbane's name and address on it; and we want him to come and identify the corpse."

"Do you know the man's name?" I demanded, divining, as I asked, what the answer would be.

"His linen was marked 'Macdonald,' sir," was the cautious reply.

"And how had he been killed?" asked Standish breathlessly.

"Throat cut from ear to ear," said the constable, with terrible conciseness.

We looked at each other, and shuddered. Neither of us had any kind feelings for the man thus suddenly cut off; in fact, we had been thoroughly disgusted with his coarse and sordid temper, and had hoped—in jest, it is true—that he might break his neck over the dismal road he had to traverse. But this sudden, mysterious, hideous murder—for such it must be—struck us with a chill of horror. My first collected thought, I believe, was a feeling of intense thankfulness that we had not left Macbane alone the night before. Now, at any rate, no suspicion could attach to him.

The policeman looked curiously from one to the other of us.

"Perhaps," he said at length, "one of you two gentlemen would know him?"

"If it is the man I suppose," answered Standish, "we certainly do know him. Mr. Macdonald is Mr. Macbane's uncle, and was here last night. We both saw him leave before twelve o'clock, and have not seen him since."

"Then, sir," said the policeman, "perhaps one of you will wake Mr. Macbane and bring him along as soon as he can come, and the other will go to the station at once, for there is never any time to lose in these cases."

I went into Macbane's bedroom, and Standish took up his hat and followed the policeman out. I touched my friend on the shoulder. He gasped, yawned, then sat up, rubbed his eyes, and stared wildly round him, till his gaze rested on me. Then the recollection of what had happened seemed to come back on him in a flash, and he laid his head back on the pillow.

"Is that you, Eliot?" he said. "I have had such a horrible dream. Thank you for waking me. Must I get up now?"

"Yes, you must, Macbane," I replied gravely. "I will tell you why afterwards."

"Moralities and mysteries!" said he, in his cynical way. "Well, I shall soon hear, if I am a good boy, and don't take long over my dressing. Reach me my trousers, there's a good fellow."

As I did so, I saw that his right hand was again streaked thinly with dried blood, and I could not help an exclamation.

"Ah!" said he, as I called his attention to it. "That thing has been bleeding again, I see. Well, I can soon wash it off." And he sprang up in his nightshirt, and ran to his washstand.

"Look here!" he cried, as he plunged his hand into the water;

"shouldn't I make a lovely Lady Macbeth? 'Here's the smell of the blood yet. Oh! oh! oh! All the perfumes of Araby—' How does it go? 'Yet who would have thought the old man had so much blood in him?'"

"For God's sake, be quiet!" I screamed. "Your uncle is lying at the police-station with his throat cut! Be thankful you had nothing to do with killing him!"

Macbane turned faint and sick, and sat down on his bed again; but he bore the news much better than I had thought he would. To be sure, he had no love for his uncle, and could not be expected to sorrow for him; but the shock did not seem somehow to affect him greatly, except by a mere physical repulsion at the horrid manner of his uncle's death. He soon got up again, and went on dressing, listening meanwhile as I told him all I yet knew about the matter; and as soon as he was ready, we went out together.

The police-station was soon reached, and we were admitted into a back room where Mr. Macdonald's body lay on a table, covered with a piece of sacking. There was no difficulty in identifying the corpse. The throat was cut, or rather, as it seemed to me, torn almost through with a frightful wound; but the face was uninjured, and still bore an expression of sudden horror and surprise that was very ghastly. We did not care to look on the sight long. When the covering had been replaced, the constables told us all they knew. Some workmen, coming to their work at one of the unfinished houses in the new road, had found the body, lying on its back in a pool of clotted blood. There were no marks of a struggle that they noticed. They had put the corpse on a short ladder left in one of the houses, and carried it to the police-station. The nearest surgeon had been called in, and had pronounced that life had been extinct for some hours. A purse and gold watch were found in the pockets. As to the hand or the weapon that had done the deed, neither the surgeon nor the police would offer any suggestion; and we could not help them. Only, as we left the station, the police-sergeant remarked that he thought he had a clue to the murderer. "Do you hear that, Standish?" said Macbane in a mocking tone; "*he* thinks he has a clue."

We walked back to Wolseley Road and left Macbane there; and then Standish and I trudged off to our work—for work must be done, whoever has died. And all that afternoon and evening, whenever I was within sight or sound of a main street, my eyes were greeted with sensational placards, and my ears deafened with the shouts of newsboys, reiterating the same burden—"Third Edition! Awful Murder in Craddock Park! A Glasgow

Merchant Murdered!" and over every placard I seemed to see the vision of the dead face, and that gash in the throat.

The inquest was held a few days afterwards, and of course we all attended it. The story of the quarrel with Angus Macbane came out, in its main outlines, from his evidence and ours; and I could tell from the Coroner's pointed questions, that he suspected our friend. But there was no reasonable doubt that Duncan Macdonald had been killed within an hour after he left the lodging-house; and it was perfectly clear from our evidence and the landlady's that Angus Macbane had been in his room long after this, and practically certain that he had never left the house at all that night. The medical evidence, when it came, was conclusive; the distinguished surgeon who had made the post-mortem examination gave it as his opinion that the wound in the throat could have been inflicted with no species of weapon with which he was acquainted; and as far as he could venture to form a hypothesis, death had been caused by the bite of some animal armed with exceedingly large and powerful cutting teeth. This unexpected statement caused quite a sensation in court; and Standish jumped up. "By Jove, I forgot the cat!" he said to me; and then, advancing to the Coroner, he informed him that he had an addition to make to his former statement. He was sworn again, and told the story of the mysterious death of poor Mephistopheles in a straightforward way that evidently impressed the jury. I confirmed his tale in every particular.

There were no more witnesses, and the Coroner summed up. He began by stating that all the evidence that could be collected still left this terrible affair in a very mysterious state. So far as he could see, however, there was happily no reason for regarding it as a murder. There had been no robbery of the body, though robbery would have been perfectly easy; and though there might have seemed some *prima facie* grounds for suspecting one person of complicity in the act—here the worthy Coroner glanced at Macbane, who smiled slightly—yet it had been proved by reputable witnesses, whose testimony had not been impugned (here Standish blushed, and I think I did, too), that the person in question could not possibly have been present on the scene of Mr. Macdonald's death at the hour when it took place, and had apparently confined the expression of his ill-will to mere words, which it would be unfair to invest with any special significance—and so on, in the usual moralizing vein of coroners. The medical evidence, he went on to say, pointed to the theory that the death of the deceased was caused by some savage animal; and the further statement of two of the witnesses seemed to indicate

that some such ferocious beast, perhaps a dog, was loose in the neighbourhood. It would be for the jury, however, to review all the facts, and return a just and impartial verdict upon the case.

The jury deliberated for some time, and finally determined that the deceased died from the bite of some savage animal, but what animal they were unable to say. A rider to the verdict directed the police to use all possible diligence to track out and destroy so dangerous a beast, and suggested that a reward should be offered for its capture or death. This was done by the local authorities, but with no result; and as weeks went on, and no fresh victim fell to the "ravenous beast or beasts unknown," men ceased to go armed, or to apprehend attacks, and the Craddock Park Mystery was forgotten.

Mr. Duncan Macdonald had left no will; and though he had torn up a testament providing for his nephew, he had not yet executed his threat of disinheriting him. So Macbane, as the only near relative, came in for the manufacturer's very considerable fortune. He sold out his uncle's share in his business, and his first act, almost, was to purchase an old, half-ruinous place, called Dullas Tower, which had been (as I gathered from the scanty letter he wrote me about it) the ancestral seat of the Macbanes before the family fell into poverty and ill repute in the old witchcraft days.

I was prevented by my school duties from seeing Macbane, now that he had gone north; and about this time Standish got a good appointment on an Indian railway in course of construction, and had to sail at once. Thus we three friends were parted for long, and it might be for ever. I was sorry enough to lose Standish; I think it was rather a relief to see no more of Macbane. He was stranger than ever, now that his sudden prosperity had come upon him—alternately gay and sullen, exalted and depressed, and disquieting enough in either mood. I occasionally sent him a line, and at still rarer intervals received an answer; but, on the whole, I thought he had dropped out of my life permanently, and I was not sorry to have it so, now that he needed no help. I did not dream of the strange way in which we were once again to be brought together.

V.

It was some months after Standish had left for India, and I had already received one letter from him, when I was startled by a brief paragraph among the Indian telegrams in the *Times*. It ran thus—"I regret to state that Mr. F. Standish, the young and

talented engineer superintending the construction of the Salampore Junction Railway, has been killed, it is supposed by a tiger." This was all—terribly simple, brief and direct, as messages of evil are now. I was greatly shocked and grieved at this sudden death of my old friend; for though I was not likely to see him again for many years, and college friendships fade sadly when college life is over, yet we had been much together before he left, and my remembrance of him was still warm and affectionate. As soon as I recovered from the blow of the news, I wrote at once to Lieutenant Johnson, a young officer whom Standish had mentioned as being stationed near his quarters, and as being an acquaintance of his, to ask for some particulars of my friend's death.

The answer was forwarded to me about the end of August. I was not at the time in London, but had been invited by an old friend of my family to stay with him and have some shooting (though this was mere pretence on my part) at his place in Yorkshire. Lieutenant Johnson's letter was sent on from my lodgings to Darton Manor, where I was. It was a good letter, showing in its tone of manly regret how familiar and dear Standish had grown in the short time of intercourse with his new neighbours; but what I turned to most eagerly was of course the account of my poor friend's death. It was brief and rather mysterious. Standish had gone out for an early walk in the cool of the morning, taking his gun with him, as was his custom. He had walked along the line of the new railway a little distance, and then turned off into the country. As he did not come back at his usual time, two of his servants had gone out to look for him, and found him lying on his back in a path, quite dead. His throat was fearfully torn, but there was no other wound on him. There had been no struggle, and the gun was still loaded. Footprints of some animal were observed in a patch of soft ground near by, but it was not certain whether this was the beast that had killed Standish; for while the footmarks were like those of a small panther, the wound seemed rather as if inflicted by the teeth of a tiger. A large hunting-party had beaten the neighbouring country without finding any dangerous wild animal.

This narrative set me on a very gloomy train of thought. The details of Standish's end were horribly like those of Mr. Duncan Macdonald's—the suddenness, the stealth, the mystery, the ferocity of the attack were the same in both cases. Yet, what possible connection could there be between the Craddock Park mystery and the death of an engineer on the Salampore railway? Still, I could not keep this haunting feeling of some impending doom from shadowing my mind. Four men had met in that

little room in Wolseley Road on that memorable night in November; two of the four had already perished by the same mysterious and horrible death. Was it possible that the same end was reserved for the other two, and, if so, who would be the next victim? It was a wild idea, I felt; but I simply could not get it out of my head, and it made me very gloomy and depressed at the dinner-table that night.

My kindly old host noticed this, and his genial nature could not rest satisfied till all around him were as cheery as himself. So when our *tête-à-tête* dinner was done—we had been very late in dining that day—he resolved to have up a bottle of a certain very rare old wine, which he kept under special lock and key for great occasions. This precious liquor he was now resolved to devote to clearing away my melancholy.

He would never trust a butler with the key of his cellar—least of all would he let a servant touch this priceless vintage. He was going to fetch the bottle himself, but of course I interposed and insisted on going for him. With a sigh of resignation, he gave me his bunch of cellar-keys, carefully instructing me as to their particular uses, and the treasures to which they respectively gave access. Then he dismissed me, and I went down to the cellar.

The cellar of Darton Manor was far older than the house. It was hewn out of the rock on which the hall stood, and was large and lofty. I think that when the old castle, whose walls are still to be traced in the Manor garden, was standing, the vaults beneath must have been the storehouse of the garrison. When the modern house was built, two windows were cut up through the rock to give light to the cellars; but the present owner had protected these openings with double gratings, and put an iron-plated door, with a strong and cunning lock, to defend his precious wines.

I took up a candle, lit it, and went down the winding stair that led to the cellar. The vault below was so lofty and so far beneath the floor of the hall, that the staircase, cut in the rock, seemed as if it would never end; I felt like one descending into a sepulchre. The clash of the keys swinging from my hand was the only sound in the chilly silence, except when noises came, muffled and faint, from the house above. At last I reached the heavy door of the cellar, and, with some labour, unlocked it and swung it back. Then I drew out the key, as I wanted another on the bunch for releasing the precious bottle I had been sent to fetch. For a moment I stood in the doorway, holding my light high, and gazing round me into the great cavernous room. I could not see

all of it; but the long rows of casks and the racks of bottles were very impressive in their silent array of potential conviviality. Then I glanced up at the windows, whose gratings were now and then made visible by a flicker of summer lightning across the sky; and as I did so, I suddenly heard a crash as of glass, far up in the house above. Then, as I still listened, came a faint sound of footfalls rapidly growing louder, as if something was coming down the winding stair with long leaps.

I did not stop to face whatever this might be; I did not pause to think what I should do. In a blind and fortunate impulse of overpowering terror, I flung the heavy door to, plunged the key into the lock and shot the bolt home. How I managed to do it in the one instant left to me, I never could understand; I had found the door hard enough to open before. As I gave the key a last turn, something came against the iron outside with a thud that almost shook the hinges loose. Then there was a moment of quiet, and I, listening behind the door, could catch a quick, hoarse, heavy panting, as of some beast of prey. Then came another great shock, and another; and at every blow the good door creaked and shook, but held firm. Next there was a grating, rending sound, as if teeth and claws were tearing at this last obstacle between my life and its destroyer—and still I stood silent, transfixed with horror, as in a nightmare, expecting to feel the fangs of the unseen Thing close through my throat. How long I stood thus, tasting all the bitterness of death, I cannot tell. It was years in agony—it may have been only minutes of time. To feel that something fiendish, brutal and merciless was slowly tearing its way to me, and to know nothing of It save that It was death, this was the deadly and overmastering terror. My trance cannot have lasted long. With a start, I awoke to the consciousness that life was still mine, and that a chance of escape yet remained. The frozen blood again coursed through my veins, and my dead courage revived. I sprang to the nearest large barrel that lay on its side and rolled it close against the door, to keep the panels from giving way. Then I took up an iron bar that I found lying on the floor—perhaps a lever for moving the casks—and stood ready to give one last blow for my life. The sound of tearing ceased; I heard one deep snarling growl of disappointed rage; and then the quick steps seemed to recede up the stair. I stood there delivered, for a moment.

Only for a moment, however. My candle, which was a mere stump, suddenly flared, flickered and left me in total darkness, made darker by the little patch of sky seen through the nearer window, across which still ran an occasional flicker of summer

lightning. In trying to strike a light, I dropped the match-box on the rock floor. While I was groping for it, I suddenly looked up and saw two eyes.

Two eyes, I say, but they were rather two flames, or two burning coals. For a moment I stood glaring, fascinated, at the orbs that glared into mine. Then, as the Thing turned what seemed its head, and the eyes were averted for a moment, I saw, or thought I saw, a dim phosphorescent mass obscuring the faint light of the window. Then the eyes were on me again, and I heard the sound of tearing and wrenching at the outer grating—for there were two, one above the window and one inside. The outer bars were old and rusty—strong enough to resist any common shocks, but not to hold against the unknown might that was rending at them. I heard them creaking, cracking, and then—oh heaven! the whole grating gave way, and I heard it ring as it was hurled aloft and fell far out on the stones. Next instant the strong glass of the window flew in shivers on the floor—and there were those awful eyes looking into mine now, with only a few bars between us. Then the wrenching began once more at the last barrier. It bent—it shifted—I thought it was giving way, and in a frenzy I rushed forward, whirling the iron bar round my head, and struck with all my force through the grating. Another horrible growl answered the blow, and the bar was seized and dragged from my grasp. It was found next day, deeply indented, on the ground, a hundred yards away.

But now that the prey seemed given over disarmed to its teeth, the devilish fury of the Thing seemed to triumph over the devilish cunning that had directed it. It gave up the persistent assault on the grating, and writhed against the bars in a transport of hissing rage, biting the air, grinding its jaws on the tough iron. And yet—this was the horror of it—I could see nothing distinctly—only a phosphorescent shadow, twisted and tortured with agonies of rage, and turning upon me sometimes those eyes which seemed to redden with the growing frenzy of the Thing, till they were like blood-red lamps. I think I had lost all fear for my life now. I did not think of danger or resistance; but so mighty was the sheer horror of that bestial rage, that I grovelled down in the darkest corner of the vault, and hid my eyes and stopped my ears, and cried to Heaven to deliver me from the presence of the Thing.

Suddenly, as I crouched there, the end came. The noise ceased. I turned and saw that the eyes were gone. I stood up and stretched out my arms, and a cool air blew through the shattered window on my streaming forehead. Then every tense

fibre of my body seemed to give way, and I fell like one dead on the floor.

I was wakened from my swoon by a thundering at the door, and the sound of voices—human voices once more. I staggered to the door, pushed away the cask, and after long wrenching—for my hands seemed to have lost all strength—got the lock open, and stumbled into the arms of my good host. Above him, on the stairs, were two or three of the men-servants, their pale frightened faces looking ghastly in the light of the flaring candles.

"My dear boy!" he cried. "Thank God you are alive! We have been so frightened about you."

I told him faintly that I had fallen in a swoon. I could not yet speak of what I had gone through, and, indeed, it now seemed like a hideous dream.

"Well, do you know," he said, as he took my arm, and helped me up the stair, "we had such a scare upstairs! Just a few minutes after you had gone, when I was wondering whether you would find the right wine, smash came something right through the dining-room window, and over went the big candlestick, and we were in the dark. And when we got a light again, you never saw such a scared set as we were; but there was nothing to be seen. Did you have a visit, too?"

"Something did come down here," I managed to articulate; "but don't ask me about it—not to-night. I want to sleep first."

"I think we all want that," he said briefly, as we reached the lighted hall again; and I, for one, felt as if I had come up from the grave alive.

CHAPTER VI.

I SLEPT late into the following morning, and should have slept later still had I not been aroused about ten o'clock by the butler, who held in his hand a yellow telegram envelope. As soon as I could shake off my drowsiness in part, I tore open the missive, and unfolding the paper, found to my surprise that it was from Macbane. He knew my address, indeed, from a letter that I had sent him; but knowing his ways, I never expected even a note from him, much less a telegram. When I read the message, my surprise was not diminished.

"If safe, and wishing to see me alive," it ran, "come at once. If unable, forget me. Nearest station, Kilburgh."

What could this mean? Could Macbane know anything of my mysterious danger of last night? and if so, was the doom that had missed me impending over him? Or was it merely that he

was ill and desponding, and thought himself dying? Turn and twist the message as I could, it puzzled me; but one thing was plain—Macbane was, or thought himself to be, in deadly need of me, his only friend, as far as I knew: and if I did not go, it was possible that he might lose the last chance of any friendly human care in his solitary life. I resolved at once, shaken and weary as I still felt, to start for Dullas Tower. I rose and dressed hurriedly, and snatched some breakfast alone—for my good old host was too much exhausted by the excitement of the last night to come down yet. While eating, I was studying a railway guide, and discovered that by driving to the nearest station at once, I could catch a train which would enable me by devious junction lines to make my way to Kilburgh (a little place in a wild part of a Lowland county) by the evening. While the horse was being put into the dog-cart, I scribbled a note to my host, explaining the reason for my speedy departure, and promising to return as soon as possible; and then I stepped into the cart and was driven off, arriving just in time to catch the train.

My journey was of the exasperatingly tedious character known to all who have ever tried to go any distance by means of cross-lines and local lines and junctions. Twice I got some food during my long intervals of waiting at stations; and all the time, whether travelling or resting, I was possessed with a haunting perplexity, a shadowy fear. Through my brain incessantly beat, keeping time to the pulsating roar of the wheels, a text, or something like one—I know not how or why it suggested itself—"One woe is past; behold another woe cometh." The mysterious peril of the last night seemed already to have happened years ago; the dim terror of the future would be ages in coming; and between them, and in the shadow of both, I was still going on and on, slowly but endlessly—a dream myself, and in a dream.

It was about eight in the evening, I think, when I reached Kilburgh station; but my watch had stopped, and I could not be sure. As I stepped out on the platform, I was conscious of an intense sultry heat in the dense night air, and a sudden little gust of wind smote on my cheek like a breath from a furnace. The train went on again, plunged with a doleful wailing shriek into a tunnel, and was lost to sight; and when its rumble died away, the utter stillness was strange after the noise and rattle in which I had passed the day. I cast a hasty glance round me, and could just make out the lights of a few houses in the valley below the station, and the dark outlines of hills around, some of

them serrated with black pines, and the sky dense with cloud, and with a denser mass of gloom labouring slowly up from the west. There was the weight of a coming storm in the air.

I asked the station-master where Dullas Tower was, and how I was to reach it.

"Dullas Tower?" he said meditatively; and then, with a sudden flash of comprehension—"Oh, it's the De'il's Tower ye'll be meaning, sir—Macbane's?"

I nodded acquiescence; this popular corruption of the name seemed ominous, but somehow natural.

"Then ye've a matter of ten miles to go," he said deliberately; "and gin I might offer an opeenion, ye'll do better to tak' Jimmy Brown's bit giggie. The man frae Macbane's tauld him to be ready the morn."

Guided by the cautious "opeenion" of the station-master, I found Brown's trap waiting outside the station. He was English, as I could tell by his accent; and this perhaps accounted for the slight tinge of contempt in the worthy official's reference to him and his vehicle. His horse, as far as I could tell by the station lamp, seemed a poor one; but it showed a remarkably vicious temper when I tried to get in—kicking and backing, and seeming possessed by an irrational desire to do me some bodily harm.

"Whoa, then, will ye, ye beast?" called Brown, as he caught hold of the rein and dexterously foiled the brute's instant attempt to bite him. "You're a harm to others and no good to your owner. You're just like Macbane's muckle cat, that killed two men, and the third was Macbane."

I had gained my place on the seat at last, but this remark nearly shook me off it again.

"What do you mean by that?" I almost screamed at the man. He turned a puzzled face up to mine, as he climbed into his place and took the reins.

"Oh, I don't know, sir," he answered, as we rattled off. "It's just a saying the folks have about here. It's some story about an old warlock Macbane that had the Tower long ago, I believe. Nothing to do with this one, sir—of course not. I got into the way of saying it from hearing it often, that's all."

I did not answer him, as we drove on between high banks of earth and rock, with now and then a tree nodding threateningly above us. I was faint and tired, and unable to think in a connected manner. The grim old proverb, like the Scriptural or quasi-Scriptural phrase, transformed itself into a dreary refrain, which rang in time to the beat of the horse-hoofs on the dry road: "*Killed two men, and the third was Macbane—killed two*"

men, and the *third* was *Macbane*"—it seemed a part of me, a pulse in my very brain, till it grew meaningless with incessant repetition.

We drove on westward, toiling up hills, rattling down them, always moving towards the storm, as the storm moved towards us. Now and then I heard the muttering of thunder—now and then a livid gleam of lightning glanced across the face of the cloud, or a moaning gust of hot wind swept up the dust, and fell silent again. I took little note of the scenery on either side; and indeed I could see but little of it in the darkness. The lightning, growing brighter and nearer, occasionally revealed some bare cliff-face, some solemn black row of pines, some thread or sheet of water—I hardly saw anything. It was all a part of my dream still, and it seemed natural to me when a black grove of tall trees, and in the midst a denser black mass, with one or two lights twinkling in it, rose up before us, and the driver told me this was the De'il's Tower.

As we came up to it, and I roused myself from my lethargy a little to observe my journey's end, I could see that part of the building seemed ruinous and broken down; the walls ended in a slope bristling with bushes. One grim-looking tower at the corner loomed high above us, apparently uninjured, and half-way up it shone a faint light.

I alighted, paid the driver, who seemed in a hurry to get away, rang, and when an old woman came to the door, asked if *Macbane* was at home. She said in reply that he was ill, and could see no one; but when I gave my name she conducted me through a long passage—part of it almost ruinous, part in better repair—to the foot of a winding stair. Here she told me to go up and knock at the first door I came to, and stood at the foot of the steps with her candle to light me up. When I reached the door—which was some way up—I could hear her hobble away, leaving me in darkness, only relieved by an occasional gleam of lightning through the narrow slits that let in light and air to the staircase. I knocked gently, and a voice said "Come in." I felt along the iron-studded door till I found and turned the handle of the latch. As I entered I saw *Macbane* sitting back in an old chair with a shaded lamp on the table beside him, and some books and papers in its circle of light. The room was small and circular, and was, as I conjectured, half-way up the tower that had given its name to the building. A window, made visible from time to time by the lightning, opened on the outer air; and I noticed with a sort of dull wonder that there seemed to be a set of strong bars defending it—perhaps a relic of old times when the room was a prison; I cannot tell.

My friend did not rise from his chair to greet me. He motioned languidly to a seat near him, and for some minutes I sat and looked at him, and he stared at the door. I noticed a new and alarming change in him, since I had seen him last. Then, his look had been almost malevolent, instinct with a positive hatred for men; now all passion, all life, good or bad, seemed extinct in him. He looked worn and wasted; but it was the settled stony hopelessness of his face that struck me most: and the pity that I had felt for him in his old days of poverty now revived tenfold.

After a long pause, only broken by the muffled growls of the nearer thunder, he spoke.

"I hardly thought you would come," he said; "but now you are here, you had better read this. There is not much time to explain"—and he pointed to a yellow and torn old manuscript lying on the table.

I was perplexed by this—for why should I have been sent for in hot haste to read an ancient document of this sort? But I did not inquire or object. It all seemed part of the inexplicable dream in which I was moving. I took up the roll and began to look into it.

It was crabbed and quaint in writing and style, and it would only be perplexing to give its antique phraseology and obsolete Scotch law-terms and phrases, even if I remembered them. But the substance of it was plain. It was a record of the trial and condemnation of Alexander Macbane of Dullas Tower for witchcraft, early in the seventeenth century. After many preliminaries, over which I passed hastily, the narrative came to the confession of the wizard. This was apparently volunteered, and not extorted by any torture; but such cases were by no means rare at that time, I think. The peculiarity of this confession was that it was clear, consistent, rational even (if so wild a tale could be called rational), and did not involve any one besides the wizard himself. Actual torture was applied, it would seem, to make Alexander Macbane implicate an old crone tried at the same time, but in vain. "The devil," he had said, "was no fool; he had better servants than these poor women." These particulars, petty though they may be, struck my attention at the time; and I have never been able to forget them since.

Briefly put, the gist of Alexander Macbane's confession was as follows. He admitted that he had, by certain magic processes which he refused to reveal (because their very simplicity might lead others to use them), secured the services of a strange familiar. This Thing owned him as master and did his bidding, though only in one way—it could slay, and nothing more. He had killed by

it two men, kinsmen of his, one his enemy and one his friend, who had in fact (a marginal note stated) died in a sudden and strange manner. But that which he had regarded as his servant (the confession went on to say) had become his master, and he a bonds slave to its devilish power. It was jealous of all he did; it had cut off any beast for which he showed a fondness, and it had driven him to cast off all his friends, and to give up all friendly feeling for men. One man, whom he loved, he had bidden it slay, or else it would have slain himself. The Thing needed to have victims pointed out to it at certain intervals, or it turned on its master. Being asked how he knew the intentions of his familiar, the wizard answered that he could not tell how, but he divined its thoughts, even as, he felt sure, it read his. To the inquiry what form his demon assumed, he said that at first it was invisible to him as to others, but could be felt; and that gradually it took visible form as a beast black and catlike, with a great mouth.

The judges here asked the reason why Alexander Macbane had turned against his demon; the answer, given in quaint but still pathetic language, was that he had married a woman whom he loved, and had been happy with her for some months, and now he knew that he must choose between her and himself as a sacrifice to his familiar. In making his confession, he knew that he was devoting himself to death the same night; but he was resolved to do this. Better, he said, was it to die horribly thus, than to live alone with his sin and its punishment. "And so," the record concisely ended, "he said Alexander Macbane, being remanded to his prison, was there found dead the next day, with his throat rent through, and the bars of the window broken. Whereby it was thought that he had said the truth as to himself."

As I read the last words, I dropped the roll; for the lightning glared into my very face, and a moment after a ringing crash of thunder burst over the building as if sky and earth were coming together. Then the roar leaped and rolled through the clouds, and died muttering far away; and through the rush of rain and wind I heard Macbane's voice.

"You understand now," he said, with that dreadful hollow sameness in his tone; "I am glad any way that you will be left, and not I; I always liked you better than Standish. Perhaps it was a tiger after all that killed him, poor fellow. You are quite safe now; it is coming for me to-night. I thought it would have killed me last night, when I called it back——" a crash of thunder drowned his last words.

"Macbane!" I cried, finding my power of speech at last; "it shall not be! Whether it is real or a dream, I do not know; but you shall not die that way. I kept the Thing out; cannot you do it? Never give up hope. Cannot you save yourself?"

Macbane smiled hopelessly. "Listen," said he, and held up his hand; and in a pause of the rain I heard, low and distinct, *a scratching on the door*.

"Open it, Eliot," he said calmly. "It must come, and the sooner the better. Then go down and wait; for it will not be a pleasant thing to see."

I sprang to the door, but not to open it. With frenzied speed I locked and double-locked it, and drove the heavy bolts into their sockets. But no rush came against the door—no tearing or grinding of teeth. I could hear nothing—not even a breath; and the stillness was more terrifying than any sound.

"It is no use," said my friend; "you could keep yourself safe; you cannot save me. It will have help to-night."

A gust of wind swept round the tower as he spoke; and mingling in its wail I seemed to hear—or was it but my fancy?—the long deadly howl of the Thing that I felt was so near us. For a few moments there was silence. Then, with a crash, the lightning fell close to the tower, and a great pine, shattered by the stroke, rushed down right against the window, and its top crashed into the room, rending away the iron bars like rotten sticks. The wind of the fall extinguished the lamp; but in the darkness and the roar of thunder I could *feel* something pass by me with a mighty leap: and next moment a fainter flash showed me a picture which was but for an instant, but in that instant was branded in on my memory. Macbane stood upright with arms folded, gazing calmly forward and upward—and before him crouched, as if for a spring, a black mass with blood-red burning eyes—the same eyes that had glared on me the night before. So much I saw; then, suddenly, the world was one blinding flame, one rending crash around me, and I fell stunned and senseless.

When I lived again, the dawn's grey glimmer was dimly lighting the tower; and outside the blackened and shattered window a bird was singing. As I opened my eyes, my glance fell on something lying in the centre of the room; it was Macbane's body. I crawled to him and looked into the dead face. There was no wound or mark on him, and there even seemed a faint smile on his lips; and near his feet lay a little heap of grey ash.